



**Remarks to Supporters of the National Task Force on Public Education**  
**Thursday, April 22, 2004**  
**Mayflower Hotel**  
**Washington, DC**

*Governor Janet Napolitano spoke as a newly-appointed national co-chair of the task force.*

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Thank you Phil. I am pleased to join you and Roger Wilkins as co-chair of the Task Force on Public Education.

Today, we are outlining processes and infrastructure that need to be examined in our education system, but make no mistake about it – our goal is to get results.

And by results I'm not just talking about improving student test scores. I'm talking about giving young people an education that will be relevant and modern enough serve them well in the workplaces of the 21st Century.

Today in America, we are trying to prepare students for a high tech world of constant change, but we are doing so by putting them through a school system designed in the early 20th Century that has not seen substantial change in 30 years.

Consider that children who are in kindergarten this year will not graduate from high school until 2016. They will not receive their bachelor's degrees until 2020. And they will not retire from the workforce until at least 2063.

Now consider that the school system they are entering is a relic from a hundred years ago that has scarcely changed since the 1950s.

I was born in 1957, and on that year classrooms featured desks, chalk boards, globes and maps – just as they had since the advent of public education. Students reported to school around 8:00 in the morning and they left around 2:30 in the afternoon. The school year ran from fall to spring, letting out for three summer months.

Now think about today's school settings. Our students are learning in that same environment, plus televisions and computers. The environment and the curricula are essentially unchanged since the day I was born.

But the world outside this system has changed entirely. We have traded the industrial age for the information age, wired the world, and diversified the workplace. The economy runs on knowledge, not manufacturing and agriculture.

If American schooling is inadequate now, just imagine how much more obsolete it will be when today's kindergarten students graduate from high school in just 12 years.



Because as much as our world has changed in the past 50 years, the next 50 years will bring even greater change, given the ever-quickenning rate of change that technology has brought on.

We must prepare young people for a brain-centered economy whose one constant is rapid change. The predominant classroom model – a single teacher lecturing to 20, 30, or even more students – reflects the production-line model of the Industrial Age, not the technological demands of our Information Age.

### **From K-12 to P-20**

For decades, we have referred to the public school system as the K-12 system, because that is the basic continuum of education that we have sought to provide every child in America. It served us well in the 20th Century, but current and future educational needs leave this pipeline short on both ends.

Today's children need more years of education than we are offering. And they need more daily hours of instruction than we are providing. They are ready to learn long before kindergarten, and on the other end of the spectrum, all of them must have access to advanced education for years after they graduate from high school.

In the early years, children need access to quality preschool, and all parents must have the option to send their children to preschool programs, regardless of their income level. Experience has shown that children who form the foundations of learning in preschool excel in kindergarten, the first grade, and beyond. They are far less likely to repeat grades in the elementary school, and even less likely to drop out of high school.

As students approach adulthood, they must be better prepared to continue their education beyond high school. The 12th grade should not be treated as an end to learning, but rather a transition point either to college or to a skilled job.

For most, high school should be followed by higher education. All students should be educated with the presumption that they are entering a world of lifelong learning.

Currently, high school in America lacks a clear mission. High school alone is not preparing students to take their place in our modern economy, because it does not give definitive direction to those students for whom college just is not in the cards, nor do most high schools have a clear strategy for preparing students for college.

College preparation should be a central focus of high school, because of the growing necessity that college degrees play in the workplace.

Currently, workers with a bachelor's degree make more than 75 percent more than those without one, and jobs requiring some higher education are expected to account for more than 40 percent of job growth in this decade alone. The demand for college-educated



workers will only increase as we move deeper into the 21st Century, and we must prepare students for that reality.

### **Improving the education environment**

Throughout America, students are learning in rundown classrooms and in schools that lack today's technological tools to give them the cutting-edge instruction they need. Too many students are learning in makeshift classrooms, converted from trailers, closets, libraries and gymnasiums, or even in buildings that do not meet basic safety regulations.

And often, they take instruction from teachers who neither have been offered the proper resources to become masters in their field, nor have been taught best practices to respond to the needs of at-risk students, English learners or disable students.

Our school facilities must be repaired, and our teachers need to be trained and treated as artisans of a noble profession. Children deserve access to safe, dignified learning environments, and they should be exposed to current technologies that they will encounter throughout their adult lives.

The school system in Finland is considered the world's best. At its root is the value that the Finnish society places on teaching. It is considered the noblest of professions there. Teachers are well-trained, well-compensated, and considered role models by their students. That value is missing in America.

Without that recognition for our teachers, it is hard to encourage the most excellent among them to teach where they are needed the most. Incentives must be developed to encourage excellent teachers to take assignments in the most at-risk schools, giving students there the same access to quality instruction as their counterparts in more affluent neighborhoods enjoy.

### **Expanded and innovative learning opportunities**

And finally, we need to rethink how we expose students to essential curricula, by presenting it in a way that is relevant to their lives and gives them the maximum benefit of its intent.

First, as students progress through elementary and secondary schools, they must have access to extended learning opportunities, either through year-round schools, after-school academics, or both. Currently, schools do not take full advantage of either the calendar or the clock to offer students every educational opportunity possible.

And second, the curriculum should be adjustable, making academics relevant to the needs of the community, and flexible enough to ensure that students of all achievement levels have the best possible preparation for education beyond high school.

Clearly, this task force is embarking on nothing less than a wholesale reexamination of our public school system. It is badly needed and long overdue.



As Governor of Arizona, I have made education reform a centerpiece of my administration. When I took office last year, I inherited a school system that was at or near the bottom of too many national rankings – dropout rates, per-pupil spending and the like. And, like most states, we faced record budget deficits.

I have been particularly concerned about the output of Arizona's system: for every 100 ninth grade students only 69 graduate from high school, only 35 immediately enter college, only 22 are still enrolled in college after their second year, and only 17 students graduate with either an associate's degree within three years or a bachelor's degree within six years. That is not good enough in the 21st century.

To begin chipping away at this problem, I have begun to stabilize our public school system by simply preserving its funding amid historic budget cuts, challenging schools to streamline their spending habits, and beginning the long-term challenge of ensconcing early care and education as a lockstep component of public schooling.

And I have set three basic goals for our public education system that are quite similar to the goals of the task force I am about to co-chair:

- Every Arizona child must start first grade safe, healthy and ready to succeed academically.
- As children advance through school, they must obtain the skills they will need to succeed in the 21st Century.
- And after they graduate from high school, they must have access to technical and vocational training, to community colleges and to universities.

So you might say I have a vested interest in co-chairing this committee. Arizona's education challenges are significant, but they are by no means unique. And the work of this group will help us take a fresh look at re-engineering our public school system to suit the modern needs of students, instead of retrofitting the same outdated model we have been struggling with for decades.

America needs an education system wired for speed and flexible enough to adapt to frequent and rapid change. It is a learning environment that in many ways will be unrecognizable from today's system. We are late in creating it, but not too late. Work begins today with the efforts of this committee.

I thank you very much for supporting this project, and I look forward to reporting our progress over the coming year.